



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 5
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

APR 17 2012

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF:

E-19J

Jane Darnell
United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service
Medford-Park Falls Ranger District
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
850 North 8th Street
Medford, Wisconsin 54451

**RE: Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Park Falls Hardwoods project
(Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest); Price County, Wisconsin (CEQ# 20120076)**

Dear Ms. Darnell:

In accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA Implementing Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service's (USDA-Forest Service) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for proposed vegetation and transportation management activities (collectively referred to as the Park Falls Hardwoods Project). The Park Falls Hardwoods Project is located on National Forest System land in the southeastern portion of the Park Falls Unit of the Medford-Park Falls Ranger District, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, located approximately 13-15 miles northeast of Phillips, Wisconsin.

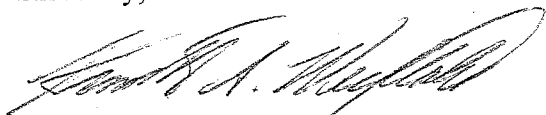
The Draft EIS analyzed proposed actions to implement the 2004 Forest Plan and move forest resources towards the desired future conditions for the Management Area (MA-2B) located in the area of analysis. The Draft EIS identified several project-specific goals, primarily to implement selection harvests of hardwoods in order to develop age structure and move towards vegetation conditions proposed for MA-2B.

The Draft EIS documents analysis of a No-Action alternative and five additional action alternatives. The action alternatives include varying amounts of harvest treatments (between 8,722 and 17,024 acres). The Draft EIS indicates that the Forest Service preferred alternative is Alternative 5.

Based on our review of the document, USEPA has assigned a rating of **“LO” (Lack of Objections)** to this Draft EIS. A summary of the rating system used in EPA’s evaluation of the document is enclosed with this correspondence. We find that the alternatives are consistent with the 2004 Forest Plan. At this time, EPA has no substantive comments on the Draft EIS.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide comments on the Draft EIS. Please send a paper copy and an electronic copy of the Final EIS, and the Record of Decision (ROD), to my attention once it becomes available. If you have any questions about this letter, please contact Ms. Liz Pelloso, PWS, of my staff at 312-886-7425 or via email at pelloso.elizabeth@epa.gov.

Sincerely,



Kenneth A. Westlake, Chief
NEPA Implementation Section
Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance

Enclosure – Summary of Rating Definitions

cc: Jim McDonald, USDA Forest Service (*w/enclosure*)

SUMMARY OF RATING DEFINITIONS AND FOLLOW UP ACTION

Environmental Impact of the Action

LO-Lack of Objections

The EPA review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

EC-Environmental Concerns

The EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce the environmental impacts. EPA would like to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

EO-Environmental Objections

The EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that must be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

EU-Environmentally Unsatisfactory

The EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potential unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the CEQ.

Adequacy of the Impact Statement

Category 1-Adequate

The EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis or data collecting is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

Category 2-Insufficient Information

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for the EPA to fully assess the environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

Category 3-Inadequate

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analyzed in the draft EIS, which should be analyzed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the NEPA and/or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

*From EPA Manual 1640 Policy and Procedures for the Review of the Federal Actions Impacting the Environment